

Inside CFSA...

*Bi-weekly FAQs & Facts FAX
For Our Child-Serving Community*

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March 15, 2002

Volume 1, Number 4

CFSA Holds Local Advisory Planning Forum

The DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) has held a Local Advisory Planning Forum of community leaders and activists to help the agency produce better outcomes for children at risk of abuse and neglect. CFSA Director Olivia Golden welcomed the 48 participants to a January 15 meeting where she outlined CFSA history and detailed her plans for the future. Participants included foster, adoptive and kinship caregivers, collaborative group representatives, court and legal representatives, private and consortium agencies, multi-ethnic youth groups, and child advocacy groups.

Since the end of CFSA's federal receivership last year and its reorganization as a District Cabinet-level agency, major institutional and legislative changes have led to milestone accomplishments, Golden said. In the past seven months, a new management team has set up a new legal structure, established better relationships with the DC court system, and made an important start on recruiting new social workers with bachelor's and master's degrees. Investigations of abuse and neglect cases, once separate, have been unified, while new training units have been created for entry-level social workers. New regulations are in place to cover group home and foster care families, and the entire agency is shifting from congregate care placement choices to a greater emphasis on family home placement, especially for young children.

Golden stressed that despite great progress, the remaining work required is enormous. She asked each advisory forum participant to choose at least one of the seven key goals in her Strategic Plan for personal attention and commitment as well as watchdog responsibility, so as to help keep CFSA on track to greater success and accountability to the people of the city. Participants responded with feedback and suggestions that were fashioned into proposals. The next forum was scheduled for March 13.

New Licensing and Monitoring Office Promotes Safety and Accountability

Under a law passed in 2000 and effective April 4, 2001, the *Child and Family Services Agency Establishment Amendment Act of 2000*, responsibility for licensing and monitoring foster and group homes now rests with Child and Family Services Agency. CFSA has published new foster home and youth residential facility licensing standards, which is "raising and setting the standards for how children live when staying in overnight facilities," said Angela English, CFSA's Acting Administrator for the new office. "Now, facilities including foster homes will be held accountable for providing children with the quality services that CFSA expects."

"Prior to the issuance of the youth residential facility regulations, there was no standard for licensing the group homes" English said. "They would get an occupancy certification from the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, and from that point on, their facility was acceptable." Now, however, all facilities where CFSA places children overnight or longer must undergo inspections for health, safety, and child protection capacity, as well as for providing sufficient staff and space, she said.

The new regulations require facilities to post in a prominent place a list of residents' rights and responsibilities, to help ensure that they are treated with fairness, dignity and respect while also behaving in a responsible manner.

Other regulations ensure child safety and well-being by governing maintenance and repair of buildings, grounds and equipment; ensuring warning measures against fire and

carbon monoxide gases; setting sanitation requirements; and establishing minimum standards for bedrooms, living rooms, administrative and counseling space. They also specify the required heating and cooling equipment, water supplies, and lighting and laundry facilities, and govern the facility's nutrition provisions and hygiene levels in kitchens, baths and dining areas.

The Licensing and Monitoring Administration is preparing to start licensing most child placement facilities in the District of Columbia beginning in April.

New Leaders Appointed for Legal Structure, Advisory Staff

CFSA Director Olivia Golden and District Corporation Counsel Robert Rigsby have jointly named Janet Maher to the newly created role of Deputy General Counsel for Litigation. In this role, created in the reform of CFSA's legal services, Ms. Maher will supervise more than 40 Assistant Corporation Counsels who provide legal support to CFSA's abuse and neglect work, plus associated support staff

Maher's job will be to make the legal services into major support mechanisms for social workers, so that they can focus more fully on providing services to District children and families. Maher earlier was interim head of CFSA's internal legal staff.

In other staff news, Molly McGrath joins the senior management team as the director's Senior Advisor. Her new duties include the key role of Staff Director to CFSA's National Advisory Board, as well as a broader responsibility for linking our reform efforts to national and local stakeholders, experts, and technical assistance opportunities.